

# ACORN



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The Journal of The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario





## ACORN

Summer 2006 Volume XXXI, Number 2

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**Cover:** Peterborough's Hunter Street Bridge over the Otonabee River. At the time  
of construction in 1921 the 234 foot centre span was the longest un-reinforced  
concrete span in the world.

**Photo:** Susan Schappert, City of Peterborough

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The opinions expressed by our  
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**Incorporated in 1933  
to preserve buildings and  
structures of architectural  
merit and places of natural  
beauty or interest**

## From the Editor

Dan Schneider



*Neglect of the past is one of the great dangers of our epoch. Rushing into the future, we are perpetually in danger of letting our traditions become an overgrown graveyard that no one bothers to tend or visit.*

— Robert Fulford

*There are two kinds of people: those who think the past is dead, and those who realize that the past is alive in us.*

— Northrop Frye

Alive in us, yes, and in the cherished buildings, places, streetscapes and landscapes that we inherit and strive to pass on to the future.

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario boasts more than seven decades of this striving, through good times and, more often it sometimes seems, bad. But, like a venerable old edifice faced with new demands from its occupants and overdue for a (sensitive) makeover, the ACO is at a turning point. Fortunately a dynamic new president and council are on hand to lead the organization as it adapts to changing times. I venture to suggest that the ACO that celebrates its 75th anniversary in just two years will be very different from the one we have known for so long.

The transformation is already underway – in size for one thing. ACORN welcomes members from the five new branches of the ACO: Guelph-Wellington, Peterborough, Muskoka, Brampton, and St. Catharines.

\*\*\*\*\*

As we survey what is currently happening around the province heritage-wise, there are a number of interesting cases playing out. Interesting not only because significant built heritage resources hang in the balance, but because of the potentially larger implications for the preservation cause in Ontario. Here are four to watch:

**Alma College in St. Thomas:** in August the City of St. Thomas finally exercised its new powers under the Ontario Heritage Act to refuse a demolition request for this designated property. Will this save the empty and badly deteriorated building? A charette is in the

works for the fall to help find the all-important new use.

**Lister Block in Hamilton:** here the City of Hamilton consented to a demolition request, but, after the Minister of Culture intervened, agreed to a 60 day delay in the issuance of the demolition permit to allow for all-party talks on the designated building's future. At press time "very promising progress" was being made and the parties had agreed to a further 30 day delay.

**Port Dalhousie:** St. Catharines council has approved a controversial new development, including a 17-storey condo tower, in the middle of the old canal town's heritage conservation district. At press time the Region of Niagara was reviewing the proposal and had asked the province for comments. Headed for the Ontario Municipal Board.

**Bronte Quadrangle in Oakville:** Already at the OMB after the developer appealed the Town of Oakville's exercise of its new powers to refuse to allow the moving of designated heritage buildings from one side of the property to the other. Heritage experts testified on both sides.

Do you know of other cases or situations we should be tracking for their impacts both locally and provincially? If you do, let me know.

## President's Message

Catherine Nasmith



*Mile and miles to go  
before we sleep.*

*We cannot wear two hats if  
we want to be either  
successful advisors or  
successful activists...We  
must learn to separate our  
aims if we are to succeed.*

— Anthony Adamson, 1976

More than a year has passed since the new Ontario Heritage Act was passed. During that time we have seen a dramatic jump in the formation of new ACO branches.

At the beginning of 2006 we had 13 branches. Since then we have added branches in Muskoka, Guelph-Wellington, Brampton, St. Catharines and Peterborough. We also have had expressions of interest from Stratford and Mississauga. This sudden growth poses a wonderful challenge for an organization that has been in a quiet steady state for many years.



In my view the reason for the renewed interest in establishing branches of the ACO is directly related to the higher expectations for heritage preservation following passage of Bill 60. At last, municipal councils could say no to demolition. When councils failed to do so, either by allowing demolitions of designated structures, or abstaining from designating threatened structures, several Municipal Heritage Committees realized that they needed support from an outside advocacy group in the community to build public awareness and to create pressure when needed.

Experience has shown that in cases where MHCs disagree with council decisions on heritage matters, and set out to lobby directly or advocate in the press, it damages their working relationships with the councils they serve. Occasionally councils disband MHCs if they feel the MHC has overstepped its role.

Anthony Adamson's words quoted above, written soon after the passage of the 1975 Ontario Heritage Act that established the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee as the means to advise council on heritage matters, have been prophetic. Richard Moorhouse, executive director of the Ontario Heritage Trust, used this quote in his remarks at the joint ACO/CHO conference in Windsor in 2005 to remind us of the separate, but complementary, roles of advocacy and education organizations, such as the ACO and the formal advisory bodies, the Municipal Heritage Committees.

For 30 years, Ontario's municipal councils blamed weak legislation for failures in heritage conservation. Susan Pryke, Mayor of Muskoka Lakes, said to members of the heritage committee a year before Bill 60 was passed: "Why designate if you can't prevent demolition?" Her preference has been to pursue voluntary designations and public education as a means to generate positive interest in heritage preservation. Unfortunately the reluctance of the Muskoka Lakes council to designate was so discouraging for the local MHC that after four rejected designations in a row the members resigned en masse. They immediately began forming a new ACO branch, which will have as one of its goals to establish MHCs in all of Muskoka's municipalities.

Now that councils "have the power" it is much clearer where the blame lies for heritage failures. Over the past year we have seen the destruction of the Forsyth building in Kitchener; a municipality trying to force demolition of a designated building on the owner of a hotel in Paisley; the demolition of the King Edward School in Peterborough; and in Toronto several failures to designate important modern structures such as the Bata Building, Inn on the Park (demolished), the Trend House (demolished), and Riverdale Hospital. So many examples of failure to conserve heritage resources...and the buildings are down before legal challenges can be launched.

Peterborough and Guelph both responded to such challenges by beginning the organization of ACO branches. In fact in Peterborough the initial organizing meeting was at the invitation of the MHC. At the introductory ACO meeting in Peterborough, Peter Rungay, the past president of the Port Hope chapter, spoke about why it is necessary to have an active ACO branch in the community. "Councils change—when a council is not favourable to heritage, even going so far as to disband the MHC, it is the ACO chapter that provides continuity and keeps interest alive."

A very successful recent example of a positive collaboration between ACO and MHC is the campaign to save the Lister Block in Hamilton. The MHC recommended against demolition, but the council was determined to demolish. Bob Bratina, a local councillor, wrote to the Minister of Culture asking the province to step in. The provincial ACO executive met with the Minister of Culture to press for her intervention in the case. The Hamilton ACO branch through outreach to our other branches and Built Heritage

News raised the Lister Block from a local issue to one of province-wide importance, with letters going to MPPs across the province. In the end the Minister of Culture and even the Premier's Office got involved to help find a solution. This is a very important first test of the Minister's new powers—whatever gets accepted there will be precedent setting.

I start my term as President at a very busy time. I have to thank Past President Scott Valens for his steady leadership over the past two years. During his term we celebrated the new Ontario Heritage Act and expanded our staff to include a PreservationWorks! coordinator, Scott James. We also began work to get more of our processes on-line, working with Meta Strategies. Most of our branches are now using the e-receipting tool and we are looking forward to getting our membership data-base up and running.

We have some remarkable new board members. Joel Ceresne has strong information technology experience. Richard Longley is editor of the HVRA Heritage Conservers Directory. Penina Coopersmith is leading the campaign to save Riverdale Hospital. Peter Stewart is a conservation architect and a member of the PreservationWorks! consultant roster. Marc Kemerer, a planning lawyer and member of the Toronto Preservation Board, will be a huge help in getting our legal challenge fund off the ground.

Perhaps our biggest challenge will be to keep up with the energy of our remarkable office manager Rollo Myers, who is also the Ontario Governor for Heritage Canada.

There is lots to be done—fortunately we have a lot of talent to draw on to get it done. I am looking forward to the ACO becoming the voice that can't be ignored in heritage preservation in Ontario.



## Manager's Report

Rollo Myers



Electronic receipting is now being used by the North Waterloo, South Bruce-Grey, London, Hamilton, Cambridge, St. Catharines, Peterborough, Cobourg, Quinte and Port Hope branches and the

provincial office. More than 500 receipts for membership fees and donations have been issued since this welcome technological advance was introduced in February. The next phase, now possible thanks to a generous donation from Cambic Ltd., is to connect the donation database with the membership list to save entering the same information twice. As with the e-receipting, this information will be accessible from all signed-on branches.

Scott James, the Trillium-funded PreservationWorks! part-time manager, reports that the new PreservationWorks! brochures are being sent to branch presidents, executive members, selected consultants, and staff at the Ministry of Culture for handing out to likely prospects. A second mailing is intended to include chairs of Community Heritage Ontario, the Ontario Association of Architects, relevant university departments and others. Also in preparation is a brochure insert aimed at recruiting consultants, as well as a model consultant's report to be used as a guide. Consultant projects this year to date include Friendship House in Mono; "Shift," a monumental outdoor sculpture by Richard Serra in King City; the Shipbuilder's House in Port Robinson; and Hamilton House Hotel in Beaverton.

Also ready for posting is our new Preservation Checklist—"Things you can do for yourself if faced with a threat to a local heritage site." There are three sections, with appropriate topics and links:

- Confirm the heritage significance of the building or site
- If the property is not listed, start the following process
- Organize
- It's all about "The right advice at the right time."

The new posters (see page 17 and 19 of this issue) can be produced quickly for general purposes, or for specific at-risk buildings such as Riverdale Hospital, the Lister Block, etc., and can be printed by the local community group for local distribution. The Friends of Riverdale Hospital printed and delivered 700 posters after receiving our design, with our logo featured as well as the FRH contact information. The captions link interested individuals with our website article "Myths and Facts about Demolition" to help counter the arguments often advanced by those with a different agenda.

The Lazarus Effect, Dr. Robert Shipley's report for the ACO on comparative renovation costs (funded by a Trillium grant), is now available in colour or black and white. Call the ACO at 1-877-264-8937 to obtain a copy.

Enquiries continue to arrive on a wide variety of built heritage issues: Regency cottages in Forest Hill and Etobicoke; an unusual Queen Anne residence in the Beaches in Toronto; repairs to the Uxbridge Train Station; a designated house in Stratford; the Paisley Inn; a heritage house in Port Burwell; Ringwood House in Whitby; a custom poster for ACO Cobourg; foundations on an 1865 stone cottage in Flamborough—these are typical of calls received.

Demolitions continue at a most dismaying pace: The Forsyth Building in Kitchener; the Queen's Hotel in Owen Sound; The Inn on the Park and the Trend House in Toronto amongst others.

Jones and DesLaurier's Canadian Heritage Insurance Program, created in 2005 to answer the special need for coverage for heritage buildings, continues to place heritage properties across Ontario and in other provinces.

I look forward to seeing you all at the November ACO Dinner.

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

On behalf of the Council of Niagara-on-the-Lake, our enthusiastic congratulations to the Ontario government, the City of Toronto, the Ontario Heritage Trust and local heritage organizations for their achievements in protecting the site of Upper Canada's first Parliament buildings on Toronto's Front Street.

In your Winter 2006 issue, several of those interviewed, including then Minister of Culture Madeleine Meilleur, stressed the importance of preserving the remains of the first Parliament buildings, our "cradle of democracy," for the public. In Niagara-on-the-Lake—the first capital of Upper Canada and the home of the first Parliament—we certainly share this view.

Indeed, at least four years prior to the Parliament buildings being erected on what is now Toronto's Front St., Niagara-on-the-Lake (then Newark) was home to the first sessions of Parliament. Parliament was convened in Newark September 17, 1792 by Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, and sat in Newark until 1796. Upper Canada's capital was then relocated to Toronto (then York), where the first Parliament buildings were later erected. We in Niagara-on-the-Lake are proud of our early history as the first capital of Upper Canada and of our recent designation as this province's first National Heritage District. We continue to work hard to conserve and protect those sites associated with our earliest inhabitants and to actively pursue the designation of significant properties under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The distinction between Upper Canada's first Parliament in Niagara-on-the-Lake and Upper Canada's first Parliament buildings in Toronto will be an important one to note as we all work to conserve and promote Ontario's heritage sites for future generations.

Yours truly,

Gary Burroughs  
Lord Mayor  
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

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## Jane Jacobs— A personal tribute

Ken Mackenzie



Photo: Mark L. Trusz, courtesy  
of Ideas That Matter

Jane Jacobs' books were, and are, a revelation. I had read several, and felt that I had become familiar with her clearly expressed views on the urban scene.

It was therefore a shock to watch architect Jack Diamond's presentation before St. Catharines City Council on our cable TV station in April 2004. Mr. Diamond assured Council that the famous Jane Jacobs would approve of his scheme for our tiny waterfront commercial district, which would "vitalize" it by incorporating a 300 foot (100m) glass tower as part of a \$80 million proposal.

The local community took some time to form a consensus on how to respond to the proposal. The obvious vehicle for this was PROUD (Port Realizing Our Unique Distinction), a community group which

had been the prime mover in the five-year campaign to have Port Dalhousie designated a Heritage Conservation District.

After hearing the assertion about Jane Jacobs' approval repeated at the developer's first public presentation of their proposal, I wrote a letter to Ms. Jacobs enclosing a one-page article describing our case in the Heritage Canada Foundation's Heritage magazine. I summarized our dilemma and explained that others were suggesting she would approve of the proposed development. At the best I expected a short acknowledgement. Ms. Jacobs' one-page typed response took my breath away. It is a triumph of clarity and provides a great summary of the dangers of inappropriate "vitalization."

Excerpts from her letter give the flavour of her disapproval...*the proposed vandalism of Port Dalhousie is heart-breaking news...this approach to mixing uses is a travesty...outrageous violations of Port Dalhousie's scale...does not take into account that the very things that make Port Dalhousie attractive as a residential community - its intimate human scale and its unique legacies from the past - will be lost to the built environment... this unfortunate scheme if carried out will in another decade or so be a laughing stock, a sample of the most idiotic excesses of the 2000s.*

Her advice?...*have a frank talk with the architect (we immediately contacted him but apparently his clients refused to allow the meeting)...these battles aren't won by invoking experts from away...can be won by unrelenting local opposition...be tough and determined...seek allies throughout St Catharines...don't give up and do be high-hearted and have as good a time as you can doing battle in your good cause...you make your own good luck...you win on the mistakes of your opponents.*

The struggle here continues and Ms. Jacobs' letter applies just as forcibly to the current proposal for Port Dalhousie.

None of us knew Jane Jacobs at the time I sent our plea for help. It is touching to think that Ms. Jacobs, busy with family, writing and continual demands on her time from far and wide, sat at her circa 1950 typewriter and sent us such wonderful encouragement. Our group continues to be tough and determined, buoyed by the support of this beautiful, wise woman.

*Ken Mackenzie is President of the ACO St. Catharines Branch. Jane Jacobs died on April 25, 2006.*

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## ACO President receives Heritage Canada Award

Cathy Nasmith, ACO president and publisher of the electronic newsletter *Built Heritage News*, has won the Heritage Canada Foundation's Journalism Prize for 2006. Established in 2001 to encourage and reward greater and better coverage of heritage issues in the media, the prize is presented annually to a journalist working in print or electronic media whose coverage of heritage issues is judged to be outstanding.

In its July 31 press release the Foundation also announced that Margaret (Peggy) Kurtin of Toronto has won the Lieutenant-Governor's Award for her volunteer work to preserve Toronto's heritage buildings, especially in Cabbagetown. Peggy founded the Cabbagetown Preservation Association and led the effort to establish the Cabbagetown Heritage Conservation District. She is currently a member of Ontario's Conservation Review Board.

The Foundation has also awarded its Corporate Prize to Cityscape Holdings Inc. and Dundee Distillery (GP) Commercial Inc. in recognition of their ambitious project to restore and rehabilitate the Stone Distillery Building at Toronto's Gooderham and Worts Distillery.

The awards will be presented at the Foundation's annual conference in October in Ottawa.





# The Kirstine Clocks: a Gift for the Future

Mary Ramsay Ramsay



When Victoria Jubilee Hall was constructed in 1897, at a cost of \$10,000, four large, round windows were installed in the bell tower. Municipal records show that proceeds from a concert held during the hall's official opening were intended to purchase glass-covered faces for a clock to be placed in the tower. But the clock, meant to strike the hours and the half hours, was never purchased.

The Town Council had discovered that clock works and the faces intended for the four circles would cost \$20,000 in total, an immense sum for the time. And so the clock windows sat empty for 109 years.



Mac Kirstine, who at over 90 years of age is still going strong, has long been a supporter of Victoria Jubilee Hall. In December 2005 he approached the Hall Committee, wondering if something could be done about the blank windows in the bell tower.

"If you think your committee could make something happen up in that bell tower," he said, "either with the old bell, or maybe a clock, I would be willing to make a significant contribution toward the project." "But," he added, "it would have to happen in time for Homecoming." So, the challenge was on!

Fortunately, modern technology has made clocks much less expensive, in real terms, than they were a century ago. And because of Mr. Kirstine's initiative, the idea took on a life of its own.

After Mac and Jean Kirstine provided the initial funding for two clock faces, the Walkerton Image Committee committed to financing the third clock face, as well as the preparatory construction and painting work required prior to mounting the clocks. Unhappy at the thought of one remaining blank space, Mr. Kirstine contacted another Victoria Jubilee Hall supporter, Gladys Jacklin, and together they covered the cost of the fourth clock face.

In May, Harkes Industries of Gorrie were able to install the clocks, using faces they manufactured and clock works from the Electric Time Company, established in 1928. The clocks are run by a computer system that has a 100-year program and readjusts itself after a power failure. They are also connected to electronic chimes and bells, which can be programmed to ring at preset times and with a choice of sounds.

At the beginning of July, Walkerton celebrated its 135th birthday with a Homecoming Celebration. Victoria Jubilee Hall was an integral part of the activity, providing the setting for the final scene in four performances of a charming historical walking play, offering three open houses, and unveiling beautiful plaques listing the names of individuals and organizations who have breathed new life into the Hall since 1997. The highlight of the celebration, however, was a demonstration of complete faith in the renewal of Victoria Jubilee Hall, and a vision for the future. On July 1, a large crowd gathered in Jubilee Garden. Surrounded by beautiful ground cover roses, they came to help dedicate the new Kirstine Clocks. Mac Kirstine gave the command, and the chimes rang out. Since then, the Westminster Chimes have been heard every hour and half hour, and a bell sound has marked the hours from eight o'clock in the morning until nine in the evening.

The Kirstine Clocks have been a gift not only to Victoria Jubilee Hall, but to the whole community of Walkerton.

Mary Robinson Ramsay is President of the South Bruce Grey ACO.



**The Honourable  
Caroline Di Cocco**

was named Ontario's new Minister of Culture on April 5, 2006. Ms. Di Cocco, the MPP for Sarnia-Lambton, was elected in 1999 and re-elected in 2003. In opposition, she served as critic for culture, heritage and recreation.

## Eleventh Annual ACO Fundraiser for Members, Guests and Friends

Friday, November 10, 2006 at the  
historic Ontario Heritage Centre  
in Toronto

*Reception, Dinner,  
Guest Speaker, Auction*

Call 416-367-8075 to reserve,  
or for further details

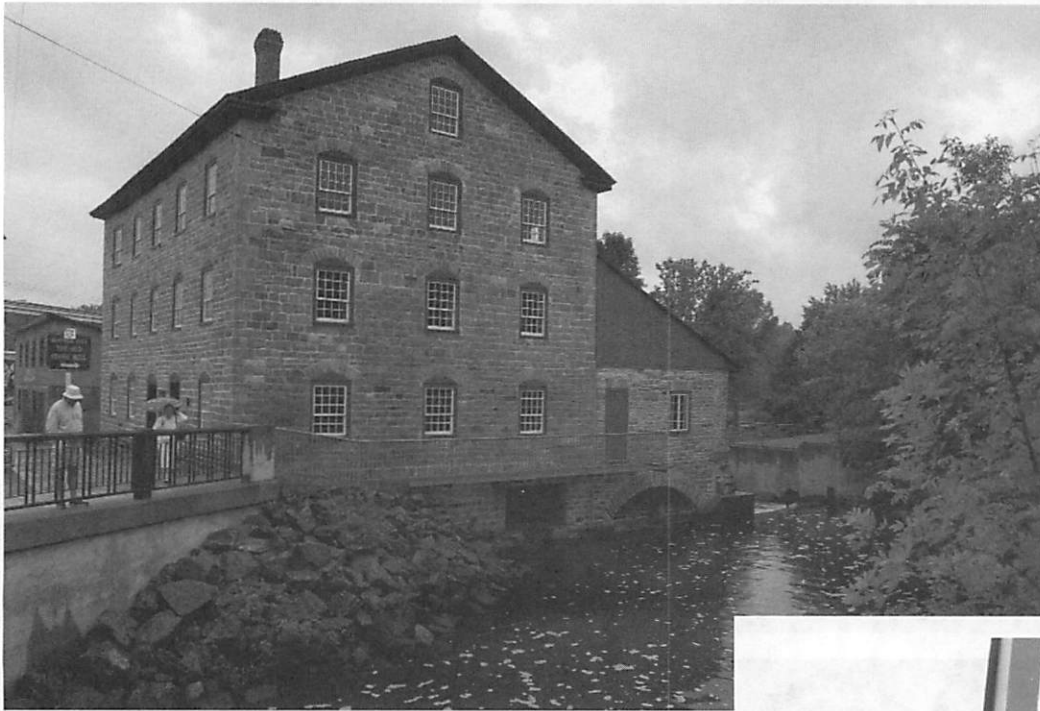
## Photos from the 2006 ACO/CHO Conference "In the Heart of the Rideau"

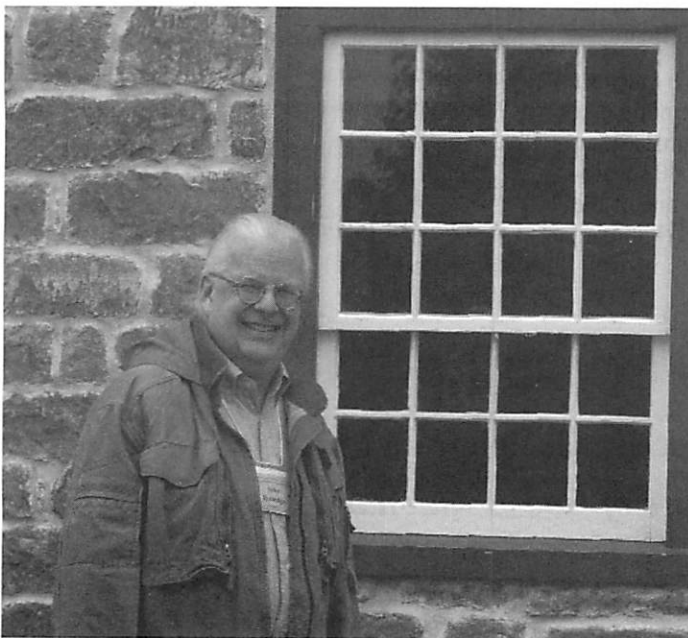
*Photographer: Rollo Myers*













## Seeking new owners— the Low-Martin House in Windsor

*Pat Malicki and Nancy Morand*



Low-Martin House, Windsor  
*Photo: City of Windsor*

The former residence of Paul Martin Sr. and his wife Nell (parents of former Prime Minister Paul Martin Jr.) is currently available and in need of a caring owner. It is one of Windsor's most important and beautiful homes—a heritage landmark in the former Town of Walkerville, now part of Windsor.

This magnificent Cotswold-style mansion (the only one in Windsor—and perhaps southwestern

Ontario), with garage/servants' quarters, was built in 1928 by rumrunner Harry Low. It was owned for some 35 years by career politician/diplomat Paul Martin Sr. and Mrs. Martin, and has seen visits by the likes of Pierre Trudeau, Lester B. Pearson, and U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The current owners—who purchased the house from the Martin estate in 1995 for \$650,000—have plans to move from the area and are anxious to sell the property. The owners and their real estate agent feel it would be easier to market the property by severing the garage/servants' quarters (shown in the photograph) from the main house and selling each house separately and applied to the Committee of Adjustment for a severance.

ACO's Windsor Region Branch and the Windsor Heritage Committee opposed severing the property. There was also considerable neighbourhood opposition to the severance application. The Committee of Adjustment acknowledged that it is the entire property that is historically important and denied the application for severance in June 2006.

Unfortunately this led to hard feelings and threats by the property owner to let the property deteriorate. In fact, there is already evidence that the current owners have not been good stewards of this important heritage property—little maintenance has taken place over the past 10 years. All indications are that the owners will be appealing the Committee of Adjustment decision to the Ontario Municipal Board.

The best way to save the building from possible severance or demolition by neglect would be to find a purchaser for the property. While not listed at the current time, it is still for sale. The asking price in 2003 was \$750,000 (down from the original asking price of \$1.2 million). This is for a 208.5 by 135 feet property with a 4,000 square-foot main house and a 1,700 squarefoot servants' quarters/garage—all in one of the last remaining nineteenth century garden/company towns left in the world (Pullman, Illinois and Saltaire, England are the others).

This unique house, with its unusual thatch-like roof, is quality throughout—leaded glass windows, hardwood floors, wood panelling, etc. The real estate listing noted seven baths (five ensuite to the five bedrooms) in the main house.

For the price of a three-bedroom home in Toronto, someone could pick up this landmark property (and a piece of Liberal party history!)—all in a stable, upscale, historic neighbourhood in warm, sunny Windsor.

The property (2021 Ontario Street) is on Windsor's Heritage Property Inventory and the Windsor Heritage Committee has recommended designation. The recommendation has not yet been forwarded to council, at the request of the property owner, who feels designation would be a detriment to selling the property (sound familiar? And yes—we have provided the owner with the Robert Shipley report on designated properties). The committee will move quickly on designation if the property is truly threatened, however.

It should be noted that Windsor has a healthy Community Heritage Fund that allows for low cost loans for the purchase of designated heritage properties and a loan/grant program for restoration projects. The Windsor Heritage Committee would be pleased to consider applications to the fund for the Paul Martin property. Please contact the city's heritage planner, Nancy Morand, at 519-255-6543 x 6179 or email her at [nmorand@city.windsor.on.ca](mailto:nmorand@city.windsor.on.ca) for additional information about the property and the Community Heritage Fund.

If you can suggest anyone who might be interested in purchasing the Paul Martin house, please contact Pat Malicki at 519-945-2626 or [pat.malicki@sympatico.ca](mailto:pat.malicki@sympatico.ca).

Let's find a sympathetic new owner for this incredible heritage home.

*Pat Malicki is president of the Windsor Region ACO. Nancy Morand is Windsor's heritage planner.*

## 2007 JOINT ACO/CHO CONFERENCE!

The 2007 ACO/CHO Conference will take place in Guelph from May 4 to 6, 2007.

The tentative theme is *"Building a Culture of Conservation in Ontario."*

*Mark your calendars now.*

# ICOMOS Canada in Cuba

Edward Smith



Havana doorway  
Photo: Dan Schneider

24 - March 3, 2006) included seminars and tours with ICOMOS Cuba President Angela Rojas, Past President Isobel Rigol and numerous other Cuban architects, preservationists and historians from Havana, Cienfuegos and Trinidad, three of Cuba's UNESCO designated World Heritage Sites.

In addition to the obvious landmarks, military and otherwise, of its four centuries of colonial past, Havana possesses a vast expanse of twentieth century neighbourhoods which, if better known, would make it the envy of many a North American city. Handsome tree-lined boulevards are everywhere graced by distinctive streetscapes of Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Spanish Colonial Revival, international style modernist, and a uniquely Cuban eclectic flavour.

The story of how such a remarkable inventory survived the second half of the last century – an era of so much deliberate loss globally – is also uniquely Cuban. Without Fidel Castro, who will go down in history neither as a builder nor as a destroyer of monuments, things would certainly have been different.

It was Castro who shelved a Modern Master Plan from the fifties which would have levelled Old Havana, first because the capital epitomized hated bourgeois values, but also because it would have been costly. His priority was the eradication of rural poverty. To finance social objectives, he nationalized commercial property but not private residences. Thus many middle and even upper class citizens “waited out” the revolution and its aftermath in houses they could not afford to maintain, let alone renovate; and thus they stand today, unaltered but slowly crumbling.

While still officially a communist country, capitalism has surfaced everywhere. Most foreign investment is at work in Old Havana where smart restaurants, museums and boutique hotels cater exclusively to tourists with Cuban Convertible Currency to spend. Working with the Havana Landmark Commission, the City Historian's Office oversees 10,000 employees carrying out a policy of “sustainable development,” which aims to preserve Old Havana as a “living city,” and not as a theme park.

The result is a living paradox, as dozens of families must be relocated for every restoration (and inevitable re-configuration) to begin. In Old Havana alone, geographically the smallest sector of the city, 500 buildings are designated monuments, yet more than 50 per cent of the residents still live in conditions officially recognized as deplorable. The “crown jewels” of the scheme are undoubtedly the five historic squares now largely restored, but critics warn that by the time the neighbourhoods surrounding them are made presentable for tourists, most of Central Havana, the largest and most densely populated sector, will have literally collapsed.

A more striking contrast can hardly be imagined for Canadian preservationists accustomed to the general hostility to historic preservation which prevails at home. As Cathy Nasmith wrote upon returning: “What struck us all was just how much the Cuban people are doing to preserve

their culture, built and otherwise; how justifiably proud they are of their nationhood – yet the story is very humbly presented.”

A sampling of tour highlights:

- a visit to the **Havana Restoration School** which teaches technical conservation skills with an emphasis on iron, glass and stone, those fields in which the loss of traditional expertise has been most acute;
- time generously given by **Mario Coyula**, former chief planner of Havana, touring the artistic highlights of **Colon Cemetery** including the Art Deco tomb of the protagonist of his forthcoming book of historical fiction;
- also with Coyula at the **Havana City Model**, one of the largest of its kind in the world, demonstrating how the miniature city can be an effective tool for the evaluation of development proposals;
- visit to the expressionist modern **National Arts Institute** in Miramar, the only major architectural commission of the Castro regime, currently undergoing partial restoration;
- a smart uber-deluxe touring coach—made in China!—and Milly, our effervescent guide, who personified Cuban optimism and cultural diversity.

Despite bullying tactics from Washington, Cubans are not isolated from the rest of the world. Landmark restoration projects in Old Havana are joint ventures with such countries as Belgium, Spain and Italy, and Cuban preservationists maintain relations with international counterparts, including American groups such as ICOMOS Vermont. They do not feel hostility either toward or from the American people. “The problem,” they will state bluntly, “is the White House.” As it happens, Nasmith's original plan for the tour included the participation of New York author Anthony Tung, who would have spoken to ICOMOS Cuba in their own capital. Regrettably, Tung's request for permission to travel to Cuba was turned down by the State Department.

Could there be fear in Washington that the city which for the past half century has been eclipsed by the rising international status of Miami might itself one day earn a chapter in Tung's book “Preserving the World's Greatest Cities”? If so, fear is the wrong response. Havana's revival should be cause for celebration everywhere.

*Edward Smith took part in the ICOMOS tour of Cuba. He is interim president of the new Peterborough branch of the ACO.*

# First Merchant Miller on the West Humber

Robert (Bob) Hulley



Remnants of McVean millrace canal  
Photo: Jim Leonard, City of Brampton

Standing on Queen Street East, in Brampton, just before it crosses the West Humber River, it's hard to imagine in the heavy sea of traffic that 174 years ago Alexander McVean and his family were hard at work at this very spot putting the finishing touches on a mill.

The McVean family were the first to realize the need for a mill in the Toronto-Gore Township, and petitioned the government of Upper

Canada to allow them two years to build a grist and saw mill on the site. If successful, they would be granted a lease on the property for 21 years. The government of the day, anxious to encourage the construction of mills throughout Ontario as a means of promoting settlement in the new territory, agreed to the proposal.

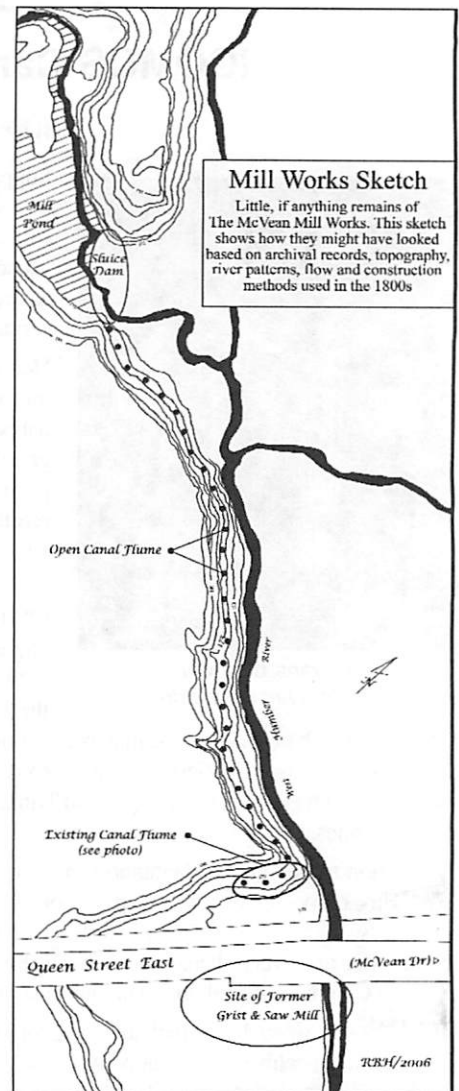
The McVean family experienced many problems, however. No less than six millwrights had tried their hand at designing a mill for the site, but all failed. Even James Farr, the prominent mill owner who founded the hamlet of Weston, had tried unsuccessfully to find the right method of harnessing the power of the Humber. He had declared the McVean site "totally unfit for want of a sufficient fall."

Fortunately the McVean family were more persistent. They petitioned for a short extension to their probationary period so that they could engage Adam Sharp, described as "a full master of his trade," to do the job. Peter McVean, son of Alexander, enthusiastically pleaded that the mill would be "one of the best flouring mills with two round stones and all the apparatus for making merchantable flour warranted to stand inspection anywhere." Government officials must have been impressed because they awarded the McVean family the 21 year lease. Not only was the mill completed in 1832 but continued in operation until 1850, when it was destroyed by fire.

Sharp's plan was simple and it worked. Instead of trying to dam the West Humber at its swiftest point, he proposed to go upstream about a mile to build a dam and sluice at a high banked narrow point in the river. He then proposed to construct an "open headrace" flume canal into the side of the glen that ran beside the river, thereby controlling the flow of water and providing sufficient "fall" at the mill site close to what is now Queen Street.

A local historian, Dave Julian, recently took us to see a portion of the original headrace canal that still exists in the Claireville Conservation Area. It is located just to the north of Queen Street where the mill once stood. That remaining section of canal is now listed on the City of Brampton's Municipal Registry of Heritage Properties. While it may not be much to look at, we believe it is well worth saving. As Sidney Thompson Fisher wrote in his book *The Merchant-Millers of the Humber Valley*, these remnants are "the distinguishing features of a forgotten stage of our rural economy."

Robert (Bob) Hulley is a member of the Brampton Heritage Board, President of the Brampton Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) and a local historian and photographer. Archival research for this article was assisted by the staff of the Peel Heritage Complex.



Sketch courtesy Bob Hulley.

## ACORN Deadline

Fall Issue 2006  
(includes branch reports)

October 16

Contributors -  
please mark  
your calendars now!



## Large turn-out for Architectural Conservancy branch first meeting

*Editor's Note: the new Muskoka Branch of the ACO issued the following press release following their first meeting August 17.*

More than 60 people attended an information meeting for the newly formed Muskoka Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario on August 17 at Windermere House.



Interim president Janet Amos addresses the first meeting of the Muskoka ACO. Photo: Catherine Nasmith

Janet Amos, interim branch president, welcomed the audience from across the District of Muskoka. Many attendees expressed a keen interest in seeing Muskoka's special buildings and cultural landscapes preserved. The new branch sold several dozen memberships during the reception time.

The evening's keynote speaker was Catherine Nasmith, architect and nationally recognized advocate for heritage preservation. Nasmith is also the President of the Provincial ACO, a charitable organization founded in 1933.

Nasmith presented an overview of successful heritage districts in North America. One familiar to many is in Cobourg. Heritage Districts protect older buildings as well as provide planning guidelines for how new infill buildings should look to ensure a neighbourhood retains its historic charm. Heritage preservation has increased property values in these districts. "Councils have the power to preserve historic buildings under the Ontario Heritage Act, but many lack the confidence to use it," Nasmith concluded.

During the question period, some asked how this organization will differ from other heritage organizations in the district. ACO branches bring together broad-based community support for heritage conservation and the recommendations that Municipal Heritage Committees make to councils. While the Muskoka Heritage Foundation successfully promotes education and private stewardship of built and natural heritage sites in the same geographic area, the ACO will advocate with various levels of government and carry out other programs to enhance a culture of heritage conservation.

One highly successful program of the ACO is the PreservationWorks! service. In exchange for a modest donation to the ACO, heritage specialists (architects, engineers, or lawyers) provide a free consultation on a threatened building to municipalities or property owners. Another province-wide service is a registry of threatened properties which are for sale. Often a new owner interested in conservation is found through this listing.

Township of Muskoka Lakes and District of Muskoka councillor Adele Fairfield remarked on recent discussions at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario regarding developments in provincial planning policy. "Councils are going to have to be well informed about areas of cultural value. Official Plan review will be very important." The ACO could play a role in this type of review.

The next meeting of the Muskoka Branch of the ACO will be at Bala Bay Inn on Saturday, September 16 from 10 am to 12 noon. That meeting will focus on preservation success stories from other municipalities including new tax relief programs for heritage properties. All members of the public are welcome and admission is free. For more information about the ACO, visit the website at [www.hips.com/ACO](http://www.hips.com/ACO). For details about the Muskoka branch, please contact Janet Amos at [amos@primus.ca](mailto:amos@primus.ca) or 764-0580.



# Port Dalhousie – A Failure of Stewardship

*Deborah Kehler*



PROUD lawyer Jane Pepino addressing St. Catharines City Council.

*Photo: Deborah Kehler*

This June at a series of St. Catharines City Council meetings spanning seven nights, 113 people spoke: 49 (five of whom represented the developer) in support of, and 64 in opposition to a proposed development in Port Dalhousie.

The development consists of a modern 80-unit condo tower, actually the tallest building in the city at 207 feet, a "boutique" hotel with 70 rooms, a 415-seat theatre and 39,000 square feet of retail/bar/restaurant/office space. It involves amendments to the official plan, zoning by-law, and Port Dalhousie's secondary plan. As well, it is a complete negation of the heritage guidelines approved three years ago by the municipal council and the OMB.

A public planning meeting in March of this year drew in excess of 800 people.

At the outset of the June council meetings, the City Planner identified five options:

- Approve the application as recommended by staff,
- Approve it with modifications,
- Defer the application to obtain for additional information,
- Defer until the heritage guidelines are reviewed, or
- Deny the application.

It is interesting that the regional planning department had provided preliminary comments on the application with a proviso that it would be making more extensive comments once the results of a peer review were available. The local planning department did not await those comments.

Those who spoke in opposition to the project represented a cross-section of the community and beyond, including directors of provincial and national heritage organizations, business and professional people, and long-time residents of Port Dalhousie. They demonstrated a shared commitment to attempting to preserve the unique characteristics of this nineteenth and early twentieth century canal village. They spoke passionately and without self-interest. Many of those who spoke are members of PROUD, the community organization that formed in 1999 to pursue heritage district designation under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Among those speaking in opposition, Pat Malicki, of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, came from Windsor to express her concern that the developers amassed their property over several years knowing that Port Dalhousie was seeking heritage designation. They did not oppose the designation. Rollo Myers spoke on behalf of the Heritage Canada Foundation. He cautioned council that once a community's heritage is lost, so goes its history.

Nancy Cameron, historian and Port Dalhousie resident, talked about the role of the early canals in the development of Port Dalhousie and the economic development of Canada. She pointed out that nowhere else does there exist such an enduring concentration of canal heritage. This is not the place for a massive, modern condo project.

Pamela Minns of the Niagara Regional LACAC Association suggested that what we are talking about here is stewardship. Quoting urbanist Anthony Tung, she said everybody loves "heritage" as long as it doesn't interfere with finance. Heritage is what we inherit from the past and what we leave to our children. It is what is familiar. It provides "rootedness," an often neglected and unmet human need. She asked only one thing, that council act in such a way that honours our past and respects our future.

Robert Shipley, a planning professor at Waterloo University, was unable to appear due to

research commitments in Europe. He provided a detailed letter that identified both legal and moral impediments to the approval of the project.

Jane Pepino, lawyer for PROUD, argued that there is insufficient information available to council to make a decision at this time. She cautioned that site plan and heritage easement agreements provide no security. She noted that it was inappropriate for the city's planning department to have weighed in with their recommendation before the regional planning department submitted its final report.

PROUD's urban planner Greg Daley discussed the need for integration of new with old, explaining that integration means more than just architectural compatibility. It means "fit." This development does not respond to the public interest.

Laura Dodson, director of the Niagara Conservancy in Niagara-on-the-Lake, reminded the mayor and council that approving this application would constitute an abdication of their obligation to protect heritage.

Professor Emeritus Brian Osborne of Queens University provided a letter urging council to recognize the importance of maintaining cohesion in communities as well as the need to address heritage tourism as an important resource.

Others raised concerns including the proposal's non-conformity to the by-laws and guidelines, parking inadequacies, the absence of any feasibility studies, and the adverse effect on an already fragile sewer system. Some residents described a feeling of betrayal and breach of trust, having relied on the heritage guidelines for protection from exactly this scenario.

At the end of the seventh evening, council voted seven to five in favour of the Planning Department's recommendation to approve the project. This result communicates loud and clear that the mayor and six members of council have not been listening to the community and have chosen to abdicate their role as custodians of our heritage and stewards of our history. PROUD will be appealing the outcome to the Ontario Municipal Board. Please visit our website at [www.saveport.ca](http://www.saveport.ca)

*Deborah Kehler is a volunteer researcher with PROUD.*



# Why are we turning our landmarks into garbage?

**Buildings account for 35% of the total waste in Ontario landfills.** The unnecessary destruction of Riverdale Hospital is not only a blow to our culture, but also to our economy and the environment.

Discarding well-designed, adaptable buildings like this makes no sense.

Call your Councillor. Call the Mayor. Call your MPP.

Citizens for Riverdale Hospital visit [www.hips.com/ACO](http://www.hips.com/ACO)



One of the ACO's new posters. The image in the poster can be customized to local conditions!



## Heritage Soundbites

*Editor's Note: To go with the new ACO posters illustrated in this issue, the ACO has compiled some useful facts on the environmental impact of building demolition. These were originally gathered by the Heritage Canada Foundation during and after the HCF conference on sustainability in Regina last year.*

### ***For use with media, municipalities, property owners...***

Before you demolish a building, or allow neglect to do the work for you, consider the following points.

From Dr. Mark Gorgolewski, School of Architectural Science, Ryerson University

- Buildings in Canada account for 50% of natural resources.
- Buildings in Canada account for 35% of the total waste in landfills.
- The Worldwatch Institute estimates that by the year 2030 the world will have run out of many raw building materials and we will be reliant on recycling and mining landfills.

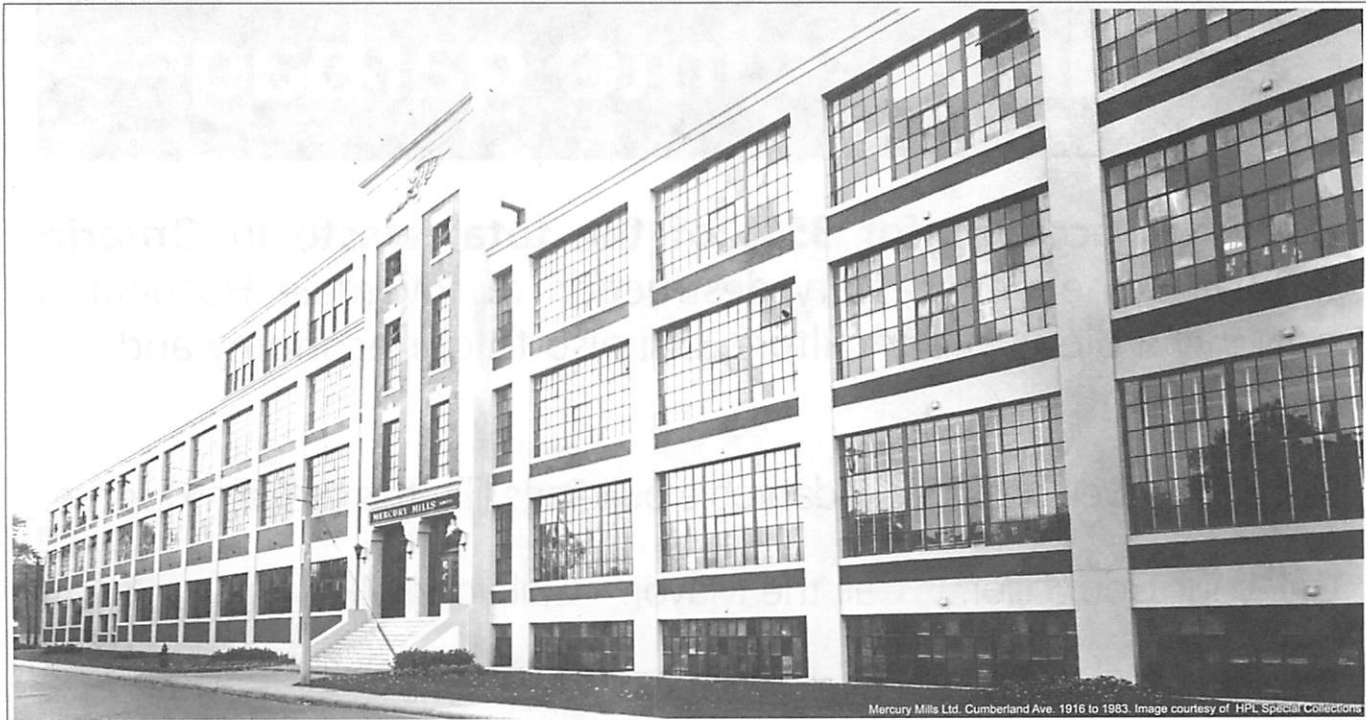
From Donovan Rypkema, principal of Place Economics, Washington, D.C.

- By demolishing a typical two-storey North American downtown building (25' wide by 120' deep) we have wiped out the entire environmental benefit from the last 1,344,000 aluminium cans recycled.
- A team of scientists headed by William Whiddon in the U.S. has shown that "embodied energy" in heritage buildings is like money in the bank. They calculated that the shell of a two-storey, three-unit, brick apartment building has embodied energy equivalent to 32,000 litres of gasoline. That is the non-renewable energy it would take to replace the bricks.

If you need help preventing a building from reaching the stage when demolition seems inevitable – call ACO, and ask for... *PreservationWorks!* – "the right advice at the right time."

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario Hamilton Region Branch Presents:

## **HAMILTON'S INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE**



Art Gallery of Hamilton Jean and Ross Fischer Gallery September 2 to October 22 2006 Free Admission

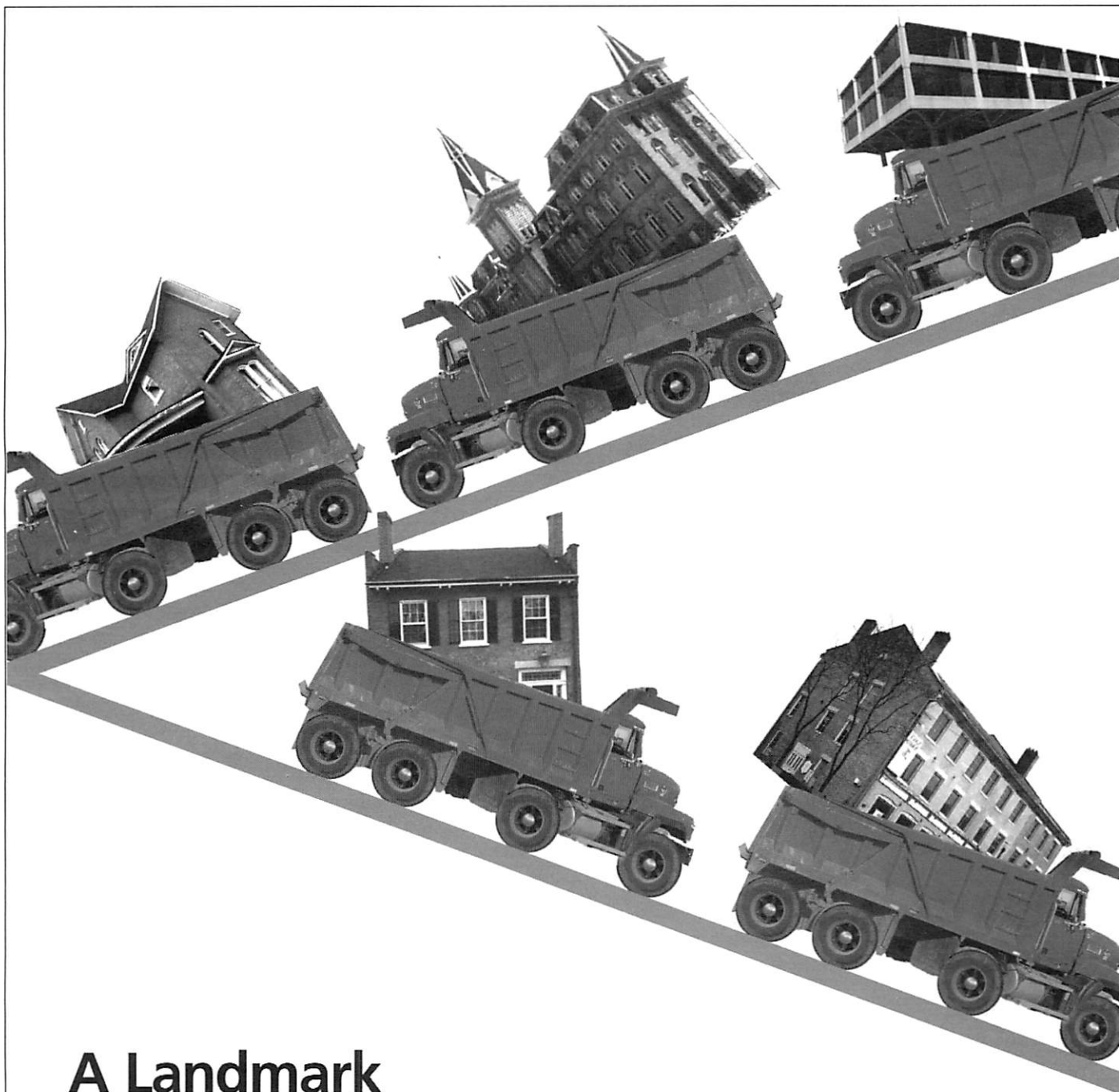
AGH Community Gallery programmes are supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the City of Hamilton, Hamilton Future Fund, its member and friends

[www.architecturehamilton.com](http://www.architecturehamilton.com)

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## A Landmark Can Be So Much More Than Landfill!



The Architectural  
Conservancy  
of Ontario

For *Myths & Facts* about demolition, visit [www.hips.com/ACO](http://www.hips.com/ACO)

One of the ACO's new posters. The images in the poster can be customized to local conditions!

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario  
Suite 204, 10 Adelaide Street East  
Toronto, Ontario M5C 1J3



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